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Susan Juster

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Doomsayers

Anglo-American Prophecy in the
Age of Revolution



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before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution (Early American Studies):

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Midwest Book Review In *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy In The Age Of Revolution*, Susan Juster (Associate Professor of History at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor), provides a perceptive and informative survey of the apocalyptic prophets of the 1790's and early 1800's. Visionaries (or perhaps simply deluded individuals), used the era's budding proliferation of newspapers, corresponding societies, penny pamphlets, voluntary associations and more to spread their predictions and prophecies. The foretellings of several hundred men and women in Britain and North America are deftly reviewed to give a general impression of how doomsayers' stories were formed, challenged, tested, and often ultimately discarded. Presenting the struggle between would-be prophets and their critics as part of a larger shift in societal norms in the age, *Doomsayers* is a thought-provoking, meticulously researched, accessibly presented and highly recommended account of an historically influential social and cultural phenomena.

The age of revolution, in which kings were dethroned, radical ideals of human equality embraced, and new constitutions written, was also the age of prophecy. Neither an archaic remnant nor a novel practice, prophecy in the eighteenth century was rooted both in the primitive worldview of the Old Testament and in the vibrant intellectual environment of the philosophers and their political allies, the republicans. In *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution*, Susan Juster examines the culture of prophecy in Great Britain and the United States from 1765 to 1815 side by side with the intellectual and political transformations that gave the period its historical distinction as the era of enlightened rationalism and democratic revolution. Although sometimes viewed as madmen or fools, prophets of the 1790s and early 1800s were very much products of a liberal commercial society, even while they registered their disapproval of the values and practices of that society and fought a determined campaign to return Protestant Anglo-America to its biblical moorings. They enjoyed greater visibility than their counterparts of earlier eras, thanks to the creation of a vigorous new public sphere of coffeehouses, newspapers, corresponding societies, voluntary associations, and penny pamphlets. Prophecy was no longer just the art of applying biblical passages to contemporary events; it was now the business of selling both terror and reassurance to eager buyers. Tracking the careers of several hundred men and women in Britain and North America, most of ordinary background, who preached a message of primitive justice that jarred against the cosmopolitan sensibilities of their audiences, *Doomsayers* explores how prophetic claims were formulated, challenged, tested, advanced, and abandoned. The stories of these doomsayers, whose colorful careers entertained and annoyed readers across the political spectrum, challenge the notion that religious faith and the Enlightenment represented fundamentally alien ways of living in and with the world. From the debates over religious enthusiasm staged by churchmen and the literati to the earnest offerings of ordinary men and women to speak to and for God, *Doomsayers* shows that the contest between prophets and their critics for the allegiance of the Anglo-American reading public was part of a broader recalibration of the norms and values of civic discourse in the age of revolution.

"This original, richly textured book . . . skillfully challenges comfortable notions about the historical interplay between faith and reason." *William and Mary Quarterly* "This delightful and provocative book describes a dimension of Anglo-American culture typically lost from view." *Journal of the Early Republic* "With dazzling execution, Susan Juster not only gives us a fascinating cast of human characters but brings alive the Anglo-American ferment in the Age of Revolution over religious change, theories of what connects body to mind and soul, modes of self-presentation and communication, and critiques of modernity. This elegant study contains many wonderful surprises." *Cornelia H. Dayton, University of Connecticut* "Outstanding." *Journal of Church and State* "Juster's finely grained description overturns assumptions that secular culture displaced supernaturalism without a struggle. . . . Highly recommended." *Choice* "In the retrieval of early American religion, Susan Juster is not just the smartest, most imaginative scholar of her generation. She is also the most artful and the edgiest. Her luminous, atmospheric study of prophecy in the early republic will change forever the way you think about the democratization of American culture. And her doomsayers themselves, rendered brilliantly in the tangles of authenticity and imposture that define democracy, will steal your heart even as they unsettle you." *Michael Zuckerman, University of Pennsylvania* From the Publisher Susan Juster is Associate Professor of History, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is author of *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England*. About the Author Susan Juster is Professor of History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the author of *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England*.